



Austin Voices COVID-19 Response Activities Report

June 24, 2021

Since the closing of AISD's campuses in March 2020 due to COVID-19, Austin Voices has worked closely with AISD, city, county and community partners to make sure that our families and students are cared for during this difficult season. In normal times, we serve over 4,000 families annually with wraparound supports, including housing, utilities, access to healthcare, employment, counseling, adult education and more, all in the interest of increasing family (and therefore student) stability. The 17 campuses that our eight Family Resource Centers (FRCs) work with most closely have seen significant and lasting drops over the past decade in student mobility, resulting in increased enrollment, better attendance, and increased graduation rates.

Through much of the pandemic, we had to close our physical Family Resource Centers (except for food distributions). However, our staff of nine social workers and 11 other staff continued to work with families by phone, virtually, and at over 70 large food distributions and community events. During emergencies, we have also delivered food and other supplies to families' homes. We were already working with many of the most vulnerable families at our schools and had referral systems in place for teachers and other staff to use for family needs that made sure families did not fall through the cracks.

Recently, we have begun to reopen our FRCs and have worked with campuses on enrollment, vaccine events and other crucial re-engagement efforts, while continuing to offer food and other pandemic-related supports. We are looking forward to a full summer of re engagement events planned with campuses, including apartment complex block parties (several in partnership with HACA), large food distributions and back-to-school events. We have also launched a Summer Health Campaign with partners, focused on getting kids ready to go back to school with sports physicals, immunizations and COVID vaccinations in place.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, here are some of the ways we have been supporting AISD families:

- **Over 7,200 unduplicated families and over 22,000 individuals** have received wraparound supports through Austin Voices' Family Resource Centers. These families have students at 103 AISD campuses, as well as other Austin-area schools.

- In partnership with the Central Texas Food Bank, AISD Police and other partners, **we have distributed food to 24,632 families** at 68 drive-through food pantries at Burnet, Dobie, Webb and Navarro sites. Each distribution provides a family of four with enough food for three days. These distributions are continuing twice monthly throughout the summer and into the new school year.
- We have given **40,000 high-quality age-appropriate new and used books** from First Book and Bookspring to families.
- In partnership with Austin Public Health, we **supported 373 high-need AISD families** with \$368,416 in rent assistance and support for other crucial needs, as well as \$20,000 in rent assistance through the Assistance League of Austin. 192 families were assisted in completing applications to other rent assistance programs, including the Texas Rent Relief, Travis County Rent Assistance and HACA RENT 3.0 programs.
- We have **provided \$724,889 in utility assistance** to AISD families through the Austin Energy Plus 1 program.
- In partnership with Austin Public Health, Austin Voices launched its High-Risk Workers Call Center to distribute emergency funding to Austin's most vulnerable working families. The Austin **Voices Call Center** has helped 1,194 unduplicated families connect to resources and financial assistance since October 2020. This effort will continue throughout the summer to assist AISD families.
- We helped **families with homes damaged by Winter Storm Uri** with \$20,000 in grants through Powered by People.
- **475 volunteers** have provided 12,500 hours of service in drive-thru food distributions and other events.
 - Working with **Coats for Kids**, we provided 3,293 coats at 12 schools.
- **753 Thanksgiving turkeys** and 350 Christmas family meals were provided. Over 2,000 families were connected with the Blue Santa Christmas outreach.
 - AVEY and its volunteers contacted 67,250 people about **completing the census**.
 - **We sponsored drive-thru back-to-school events** at Burnet MS, Dobie MS and Walnut Creek ES for over 1,500 families, as well as the drive-thru HopeFest event at Northeast ECHS.
- We have **continued a full program of virtual adult education programs** through our partnerships with ACC, the Mexican Consulate, Phoenix House and other partners. These included 22 digital literacy classes in partnership with ACC. 747 students total enrolled in 14 adult education courses.
- We awarded **150 refurbished laptop computers** to families in partnership with the Mexican Consulate and AllTogether ATX.
- **School supplies**, including backpacks, were given to over 2,000 students with support from Gas pedal, Austin FC, Celebration Church and Austin Chinese Church.
- We have provided **500 box fans** to families in partnership with Family Eldercare, as well as 44,400 **diapers** and other hygiene supplies through Austin Diaper Bank.

- We continued to **long-term case management** over 500 high-need families through our eight Family Resource Centers, provided services to 2,397 individuals.
- We have **worked with campuses to connect with difficult to reach families**, including doing home visits to provide materials about virtual learning.
- We have **distributed resource sheets and posters** throughout northeast Austin, with QR codes connecting families to the most up-to-date information on resource areas, including health, housing, food and adult education.
- We **organized monthly “virtual community school alliance” partner meetings**, bringing dozens of resource providers and community members together to strategize during the COVID crisis.
- Our **Community Block Leader program** has 58 AISD parents from over 20 campuses taking part in weekly zoom training calls. Block leaders reach out, on average, to 20 other families each week with helpful information about resources, connecting to their schools, and advocacy opportunities, including voting and census registration.
- We held a **student-led school board candidate forum** in October, with students focusing on equity issues during the pandemic.
- In December, we held a **Housing, Health and Hunger Virtual Summit** with 225 participants from 50 organizations to assess pandemic needs going into the new year.
- On June 7-8, we held a **virtual two-day “community school summit” to bring together AISD community schools**, as well as community schools from around the state, with 225 attendees. 19 AISD campuses had teams of teachers, staff, parents and community partners focused on innovative strategies to re-engage students, parents, teachers/staff and community partners in the upcoming school year. Each team did a “Shark Tank” presentation, and Austin Voices will be working with teams throughout the summer to assist with implementation of strategies.
- We will be continuing **food distributions, re-engagement block parties and vaccination events throughout the summer** to help schools maximize enrollment. Our **summer health campaign** is aimed at making sure students are ready with immunizations, sports physicals and COVID vaccinations as they enter the new school year.

All of these activities demonstrate the value of having community school systems in place, and the value of community schools as an equity strategy. Our goal this summer is to make sure that as many students as possible show up ready to learn in the fall.

We are grateful for the joint funding provided by the City of Austin, AISD, Travis County and private partners that have helped us over the past decade to develop this network of services able to quickly expand during crisis events.

Current locations of Austin Voices’ Family Resource Centers:

Burnet Middle School
Dobie Middle School

LBJ High School*

Martin Middle School

Mendez Middle School

Navarro Early College High School

Northeast Early College High School*

Webb Middle School

**operated by AISD with support from AVEY*